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DE RUEHGB #2943/01 2461159
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 031159Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3158
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002943

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: RAMADI MARKET FLORISHES AMID DECREASING VIOLENCE

Classified By: Anbar PRT Leader Jim Soriano for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUBJ: RAMADI MARKET FLOURISHES AMID DECREASING VIOLENCE

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: Ramadi's central market has seen an upsurge in commercial activity as a result of decreasing violence in the city. Goods are flowing into the market from Syria, Turkey and Baghdad, according to an unscientific inquiry made by members of PRT Anbar during an August 25 visit to the market. Shops are now filled with goods hardly attainable last year, and people are buying them, shopkeepers tell us. The central market's rebound is a gauge of Ramadi's overall recovering retail activity, said West Central Ramadi District Council Representative, Professor Rashid. While most shopkeepers and shoppers seemed happy or amused to see U.S. civilians in their market, some latent hostility was displayed by others. Multinational Force-West (MNF-West) records show 408 incidents, about 14 a day, in the whole province last month, the eighth consecutive month in which the overall level of violence has declined. There were only 27 incidents recorded in the Ramadi area in August, an historic low, compared to the 924 incidents in July 2006, the historic high. End Summary.

MARKET RISING

[1](#)3. (U) Shopkeepers in Ramadi's central market have un-shuttered their doors and painted over bullet-pocked concrete to reopen their stores. Vendors told us during a visit to the market on August 25 that business has returned to near-normal levels, compared to just eight months ago, when much of the market and the city was controlled by Sunni insurgents or al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and fighting kept shop doors closed. "Last year I could only open my shop for a few hours a day, and that was only on some days," one shopkeeper said. "We could not find things to sell." However, goods are now flowing in from Syria and Baghdad - with some additional items making their way to the market from Turkey via the Kurdish north. "We can now offer these goods," the shopkeeper said as he waved his arm over shelves filled with Turkish tea and coffee services, silver platters, dining linen and other items which were difficult to find last year.

14. (U) The flourishing market is a sign that Ramadi has returned to a semblance of normalcy, said Professor Rashid, a member of the West Central Ramadi District Council. "The market is a way of telling how Ramadi is doing," Professor Rashid said. "When it is doing well, the city is doing well." Rashid, who supports the presence of Coalition Forces and openly opposes the insurgency and AQI, pointed out that an increased Iraqi Police presence throughout the city has much to do with the current stability and resurgence of the central market. Many of those police were actively fighting against Coalition Forces last year, he added. But AQI excesses and guidance from tribal leaders to work with U.S. forces turned that around. Sipping sweet tea next to fountain in a small, recently renovated park, Rashid told us that most Ramadi residents feel that life is getting back to normal. "We want to live a normal life, and we are beginning to do so," he said. He added that many Ramadi residents now look favorably on U.S. forces. During our visit to the market and through the main roads and side-streets of Ramadi, residents generally exchanged greetings, smiled and waived - though their enthusiasm might have been nudged to some degree by the armed Marine patrol that accompanied us. Some latent hostility was displayed by a few.

15. (U) Ramadi businessman Sa'ad Hamed Sharji, who has cooperated with Coalition

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Forces for more than four years, added that many Ramadi business leaders are hopeful that Anbar's improved security situation could be a magnet for investment from elsewhere in Iraq. "We have this hope," Sharji said. He described a group of Baghdad businessmen who recently traveled to Ramadi to assess opportunities. "First of all, you need security to do business," Sharji said. "Compared to many places in Iraq, we have security."

16. (U) Shops are now filled with furniture items such as decorative, carved wood bedroom sets and ornate gold-laced comfort chairs that would rival Saddam's presidential palace collection. Also available are imported clothing and shoes, sporting goods and piles of soccer jerseys touting every team from Manchester United to Real Madrid - but especially Team Iraq. What's more, said Mouwaffaaq, a shopkeeper selling bathroom accessories, people are buying the goods. The market on the Saturday holiday was filled with shoppers, he pointed out. Last year, shoppers simply stayed indoors.

COMMENT

17. (C) This new-found commercial life comes against the backdrop of a notable improvement in Anbar's security. Security incidents in Anbar Province in August continued a general downward trend that began last fall. According to MNF-West records, there were 421 incidents, about 14 a day, in the whole province last month, the eighth consecutive month in which the overall level of

violence has declined. The tally compares to the 1,700 to 1,900 security incidents typically seen on a monthly basis last summer and fall. Security improvements around Ramadi, the provincial capital, are even more dramatic than those for the province as a whole. There were only 27 incidents recorded in the Ramadi area in August, an historic low, compared to the 924 incidents in July 2006, the historic high. Since June 1, the Ramadi area has experienced at least 32 days in which there have been no security incidents at all. A battlefield six months ago, Ramadi is no longer under insurgent control. Our visit to the Ramadi central market was designed to gauge - in a strictly unscientific manner - the vitality of the market and the retail climate in the capital of Anbar province. Several shopkeepers told us that the sight of U.S. civilians walking through the market was another sign that the violence had abated. The market has clearly rebounded from the days of violence last year.

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